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IEMA Highlights Radiation Safety in December

Agency Programs Protect People from Radiation Hazards

SPRINGFIELD – While the Illinois Emergency Management Agency (IEMA) is widely recognized for its efforts in emergency preparedness and response to events such as floods, tornadoes and blizzards, the agency also administers more than two dozen radiation safety programs that help protect people every day from unnecessary exposure to radiation.

As part of its 2012 preparedness campaign, IEMA will highlight these programs and let people know what they can do to stay safe from radiation they may encounter in their lives.

“People may think if they don’t live near a nuclear power plant, radiation safety doesn’t affect them,” said IEMA Director Jonathon Monken. “But if you’ve ever had an x-ray or nuclear medicine procedure, live or work in a building that has radon gas, travel on highways where nuclear spent fuel shipments or other radioactive materials travel, you’ve been affected by one or more of our programs.”

As home to 11 operating nuclear power reactors at six sites, the most in the U.S., nuclear safety is a top priority for the state of Illinois. IEMA’s program includes a state-of-the-art remote monitoring system that transmits thousands of data points 24/7 from inside and around each of the power plants to IEMA headquarters. The data is continuously monitored, and during an incident at the plant is analyzed by experts to develop recommended actions for protecting the public.

IEMA also has state Resident Inspectors stationed at each of the nuclear power stations. The inspectors perform independent safety inspections of critical equipment at the plant, and report findings to the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), which regulates the nuclear facilities.

During an incident at the plant, the Resident Inspector would provide first-hand information to analysts in the Radiological Emergency Assessment Center (REAC), located in the State Emergency Operations Center in Springfield.

A comprehensive emergency plan, known as the Illinois Plan for Radiological Accidents, has been developed for each of the six operating plants. The plan details actions local and state response organizations will take to protect the public during a nuclear power plant incident. The plan for each plant is practiced every two years through a graded exercise evaluated by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

With six plants, Illinois is involved in three nuclear power plant drills each year.

On Dec. 5, IEMA will participate in an emergency drill for the Quad Cities nuclear power station in Cordova. IEMA will coordinate with local responders in Rock Island and Whiteside counties as well as with Exelon, which operates the Quad-Cities nuclear plant, in the exercise. The Iowa counties of Scott and Clinton will also be participating in the drill.

More than 125 IEMA and other state agency personnel will participate in the one-day drill at several locations, including the SEOC and REAC in Springfield, a Unified Area Command in Whiteside County, IEMA's Radiological Assessment Field Teams, a Joint Information Center in Warrenville and emergency operations centers in Rock Island and Whiteside counties.

The one-day drill will be evaluated by the FEMA, which will provide preliminary findings for the state of Illinois and Rock Island and Whiteside counties at a public meeting on Friday, Dec. 7 at 2 p.m. at the Quad Cities Station Training Center, 22710 206th Avenue North in Cordova.

People who live within a 10-mile radius of each nuclear power plant, known as the Emergency Planning Zone, receive an informational brochure each year from Exelon containing information about their local plants and emergency information, such as evacuation routes and radio stations that will broadcast emergency instructions during an incident.

More information about the agency's nuclear safety program is available on the IEMA website at www.iema.illinois.gov and the Ready Illinois website at www.Ready.Illinois.gov.